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Department of State TELEGRAM

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ACTION ARA-16

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 AIO-07 INR-10 SS-15 OIC-02 CIAE-00
DODE-00 H-01 IO-15 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 HA-06
L-03 TRSE-00 PM-09 PA-01 INRE-00 SAL-01 ICAE-00
SP-02 SPRS-02 /091 W

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O R 221600Z JUL 81
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4886
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PAN/INTAFF

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 5526

E.O. 12065: GDS 7/21/87 (GETTINGER, CARL) OR-P
TAGS: PINS, PINT, ES
SUBJECT: LEADS IN THE CHALATENANGO KILLINGS

REF: (A) SS 5308; (B) SS 5330

1. (C- ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY: POLOFF SPOKE JULY 18 AND JULY 20 WITH TWO UNCONNECTED SOURCES ABOUT THE JULY 7/8 MASS KILLING IN CHALATENANGO. BOTH SOURCES SAID THAT THE VICTIMS WERE TAKEN FROM CASERIO LOS HERNANDEZ (SAN SALVADOR DEPARTMENT) BY ARMED MEN SOME OF WHOM WORE SECURITY FORCE UNIFORMS. THE SOURCES SAID THAT THE MILITARY IN THE AREA SUSPECTED THE CASERIO RESIDENTS OF HELPING THE GUERRILLAS. ONE SOURCE DIRECTLY ACCUSED SECURITY FORCE MEMBERS OF THE CRIME; THE OTHER OUTLINED THE FACTS AS HE UNDERSTOOD THEM IN A WAY THAT GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SECURITY FORCES WERE RESPONSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

3. ON JULY 16 POLOFF SPOKE WITH [redacted] SAID THAT THE BODIES FOUND ON JULY 8 BY THE METAYATE RIVER IN CHALATENANGO DEPARTMENT WERE THOSE OF CAMPESINOS WHO HAD LIVED IN CASERIO HERNANDEZ, ONE OF SEVERAL "CASERIOS" (VILLAGES) IN LOMA DE RAMOS. AMONG THE DEAD WERE REFUGEES FROM CANTONS LOCATED HIGHER ON THE SLOPES OF THE GUAZAPA VOLCANO. THE VICTIMS HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM THE VILLAGE BY ARMED MEN, SOME OF WHOM WERE UNIFORMED. THIS HAD OCCURRED LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 7. [redacted] SAID THAT AFTER THE PEOPLE (MOSTLY MEN) WERE TAKEN THE REMAINING RESIDENTS MADE EFFORTS TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF THEIR RELATIVES. THEY WERE UNSUCCESSFUL UNTIL THE FOLLOWING DAY. [redacted] ON JULY 8 SOME OF THE RELATIVES WERE IN GUAZAPA (SLIGHTLY OVER TWO KILOMETERS AWAY) WHEN WORD ARRIVED THAT BODIES WERE FOUND THERE SCATTERED NEAR THE METAYATE RIVER (OVER 30 KILOMETERS DISTANT). SOME OF THE RELATIVES, THE MAYOR OF GUAZAPA AND RED CROSS PERSONNEL WENT TO THE SITE OF THE REPORTED DISCOVERY. THEY FOUND THERE 32 OF THEIR ABDUCTED PEOPLE, ALL OF THEM DEAD AND MANY OF THEM DISFIGURED.

5. ONLY JULY 20 POLOFF SPOKE WITH A MEMBER OF THE GROUP WHICH FOUND THE BODIES. THE SOURCE, WHOM WE BELIEVE IS ABSOLUTELY CREDIBLE) CONFIRMED THE [redacted] TALE ALMOST IN ITS ENTIRETY. THE SOURCE TOLD POLOFF THAT ON THE MORNING OF JULY 8 WOMEN FROM CASERIO HERNANDEZ ARRIVED IN GUAZAPA SAYING THAT VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE MEN LIVING IN THE VILLAGE AND TWO OR THREE WOMEN HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY BY POLICE (VARIETY UNSPECIFIED) AND OTHER ARMED MEN. THIS, SAID THE WOMEN, HAD OCCURRED AT APPROXIMATELY 6:00 P.M. THE SOURCE TRAVELLED TO SAN SALVADOR IN AN EFFORT TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF SOMEONE IN THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE TASK OF FINDING THE VICTIMS. HE ALREADY SUSPECTED, HE SAID, THAT THE CAMPESINOS HAD MET A BAD END; THE WOMEN REPORTED FINDING THE BLOODY UNDERGARMENTS OF ONE WOMAN ALONG A DRY CREEKBED. NEVERTHELESS, THE SOURCE SPOKE WITH A POC OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF INVESTIGATING GOVERNMENTAL ABUSES AND OBTAINED THAT OFFICIAL'S AGREEMENT TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER. HE LEFT FOR GUAZAPA, ARRIVING THERE AT 3:00P.M.

7. BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL A LOTTERY TICKET VENDOR PASSING THROUGH GUAZAPA HAD REPORTED SEEING A LARGE NUMBER OF BODIES AT THE RIVER SITE IN CHALATENANGO. THE SOURCE WENT TO THE SITE WITH A GROUP OF OTHER RESIDENTS. THERE THEY FOUND 28 BODIES OF THE CASERIO HERNANDEZ RESIDENTS. (WE CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE PREVIOUS FIGURE OF 32 AND THIS SOURCE'S COUNT.) HE SAID THAT THE THROATS OF THE VICTIMS HAD BEEN CUT. SOME HAD BEEN HACKED BY MACHETES. ALL, HE SAID, WERE VERY BLOODY. HE AND MOST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP RETURNED TO GUAZAPA. SOME OF THEM BORROWED A LARGE TRUCK AND RETURNED

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [redacted] DATE 8 JUL 1982
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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O R 221800Z JUL 81
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TO THE SCENE WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT THEY COULD RECOVER THE BODIES. BY THE TIME THEY ARRIVED ORDERS HAD BEEN GIVEN (APPARENTLY BY MILITARY AUTHORITIES) TO BURY THE BODIES; THE BURIAL WAS ALREADY IN PROGRESS WHEN THEY CAME.

8. COMMENT: WE ARE REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ACCURATELY REFLECT THE FACTS OF THIS CASE:
-- BETWEEN 28 AND 32 PEOPLE WERE KILLED IN CHALATENANGO DEPARTMENT DURING THE NIGHT OF JULY (#)
--THE VICTIMS WERE ABDUCTED FROM CASERIO HERNANDEZ;
-- THE PLACE OF THEIR ABDUCTION IS AT LEAST 30 KILOMETERS DISTANT FROM THE SITE OF THEIR MURDER;
--THE ABDUCTORS WERE ARMED MEN SOME OF WHOM WORE UNIFORMS;
--THE VICTIMS WERE ALMOST ALL MALES;
--MACHETES WERE USED TO KILL THEM.

BUT TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS STILL REMAIN UNANSWERED: WHO KILLED THESE 30 FARMERS AND WHY WERE THEY KILLED?

9. A STATEMENT PUT OUT BY THE SALVADORAN MILITARY ON JULY 10 CLAIMED THAT THE VICTIMS OF THIS CRIME WERE CIVIL DEFENSE COMMITTEE MEMBERS KILLED BY "TERRORISTS." OUR SOURCES EITHER DISBELIEVE THAT ASSERTION OR SERIOUSLY DOUBT ITS ACCURACY [redacted] REJECTS IT OUT OF HAND AND BLAMES THE "POLICE" (LIKELY THE TREASURY POLICE) AND THE DEATH SQUADRON. THESE, SHE QUOTES HER OWN SOURCES AS SAYING, FREQUENTLY HARASSED THE RESIDENTS OF THE CASERIO, TOLD THEM TO LEAVE THE AREA, WARNED THEM THAT IF THEY DID NOT THEY WOULD BE KILLED, AND, FINALLY, CARRIED OUT THEIR THREAT. OUR SECOND SOURCE WAS UNWILLING TO SAY DEFINITELY THAT SECURITY FORCES' MEMBERS AND THE DEATH SQUADRON WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS. GUERRILLAS SOMETIMES DRESS IN MILITARY UNIFORMS, HE SAID. THE WIVES OF THE VICTIMS REPORTED A MYSTERIOUS RED MARK ON THE HELMETS OF THOSE WHO ARRIVED TO ABDUCT THEIR HUSBANDS. THE SOURCE COULD NOT EXPLAIN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MARKINGS. NO ONE PRESENT AT THE TIME OF THE ABDUCTION, HE SAID, HAS BEEN WILLING TO IDENTIFY ANY OF THE ARMED MEN WHO ARRIVED THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 7. THEREFORE, HE SAID, HE CANNOT BE SURE. NEVERTHELESS, OUR SOURCE IDENTIFIED SOME KEY INDICATORS THAT IN HIS MIND TEND TO PLACE THE ONUS ON THE SECURITY FORCE/CIVIL DEFENSE/ DEATH SQUADRON COALITION. THE SOURCE KNEW, FOR INSTANCE, THAT GUERRILLAS FORCED THE RESIDENTS OF LOS HERNANDEZ TO FEED THEM AND ON OCCASION HARBOR THEM. HE SAID THAT THE MILITARY WERE AWARE OF THIS AND THAT THEY CONCLUDED THAT THE RESIDENTS SIDED WITH THE GUERRILLAS. HE THOUGHT IT UNLIKELY THAT GUERRILLAS WOULD OR COULD HAVE TAKEN THE VICTIMS TO A POINT 30 KILOMETERS AWAY IN ORDER TO KILL THEM. CAMPESINOS IN THE METAYATE AREA HEARD VEHICLES AT THE TIME OF THE KILLINGS: IT IS FAR MORE LIKELY, HE SAID,

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THAT THE SECURITY FORCES WOULD BE TRANSPORTING PEOPLE ABOUT IN VEHICLES THAN THE GUERRILLAS. THE SOURCE ADDED THAT ALTHOUGH NONE OF THE SURVIVORS WOULD IDENTIFY ANY OF THE ABDUCTORS THEY DID DEMONSTRATE FEAR OF THE MILITARY. OUR SOURCE LEFT LITTLE DOUBT THAT WHO HE BELIEVES KILLED THE LOS HERNANDEZ RESIDENTS. END COMMENT.
HINTON

NOTE BY OC/T: (#) OMISSION, CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.